

Qua Creativity, Qua

Preamble 101

I propose that this document will not only serve as the candid musings of some university student among many, but that it will invite you to use this sheet of paper as a screen upon which your own feelings about creativity (as a personality forming construct) may be projected, whether in reflection or disjunction. When, for instance, I read the work of someone I don't know as well as I would like, its not so much their personal banalities or idiosyncrasies that speak to me as it is the fact that such specifics *can* be shared amongst many, myself and the respective author notwithstanding. Thus, when I state the obvious humdrums of 'I think this...' or 'When this happened to me...' I'm aim to refer more to the underlying abstract concept rather than to any actual event. For instance, one time, in December 2009, I wrote a paper that let me open my mind to the wonders of critical thinking about creativity, while still allowing me the freedom to experiment with traditional essay structure.

Where's the Intro?

Evidently, then, I'm drawn to modes of address that are as self-aware as they are trenchant. I have a keen fascination in art that drives *thought*, not entertainment, and an aloof vision of the world as an intellectual's playground, where ideas in conflict swing in tandem, glide upwards on the rhetoric slide, and spin and intertwine dynamically *ad nauseum*. Plato-nic philosophical purposelessness that brings others headache brings me ecstasy—and I'm willingly addicted. But enough with the imagery... on with the *imagery*.

For as long as I can remember, I wanted to be an engineer. I wanted to invent new things and work with mechanical parts and movable pieces, almost as if they were jigsaw puzzles waiting to be solved. I adored the challenge and structured complexity of it all, but equally found pleasure in the seeming randomness, chaos and variability within each different kind of object. Although I found his article to be overly verbose and lengthy, David Bohm's "On Creativity" proved to be the single-most useful article on the course syllabus, for me.

There are so many rich and insightful quotes in the first five paragraphs alone that I've had to hack them up into pieces, and will now regurgitate them back onto the page in a diasporas of pseudo-philosophical rhetoric: A scientist has a keen interest in discovering the laws of natural phenomenon, thereby gaining a sense for how to predict them later on; solving these 'puzzles' gives him or her something more significant than pleasure: a new discovery is made, something which has been previously unknown is now more tangible, better understood, in greater harmony with one's own thinking, and thus ever more beautiful as a result.

As a kid, I avidly took apart old electronics and disassembled their pieces into various groups of usable components, which I then recycled into my own projects and tests. Without any kind of formal training I learned a substantial amount of nuanced information about circuits, electricity and mechanics. I even remember



using the Internet, in its earliest stages, to retrieve a chart to aid in memorizing resistor colour codes, which I still own to this day. Basically, my desire to invent and experiment with these interesting, interactive materials led me down a fruitful path of exploration in the field of science.

Accordingly, I'd say I'm a rational thinker, someone who takes in the situation at hand, thinks it over analytically, then attempts to 'solve the problem' via a sequence of likely solutions, learning significantly from each contiguous failure. Being a middle-class white male who generally gets what he wants if he sets my mind to it, I grew up thinking that you can and should try things out yourself, *then* proceed to deal with the possibilities that arise out of such attempts. If something goes wrong, there'll be a fix, either brought about by myself or another factor. A convenient parallel is the 'undo' button in a word processor, which allows you to try out ~~lots~~ copious amounts of word combinations, each time narrowing in on the one that best communicates your intent. The key factor worth mentioning here is that I like to test things out—because rarely can I not find any kind of productive insight generated from the experience.

Well, after two years of 'testing out' the Engineering program at the U of C, I had learned what lessons I was willing to learn (science > everything, math is complicated but useful, *engg* profs suck), and it was time to switch to something more amenable to me lifelong passion: art. Some might say (they have, in fact) that the switch from engineering to film was a drastic one; I, too, thought this at first. Reading Lisa Cartwright's study of the cinema's scientific underpinnings (that trace all the way back to earliest Lumière films) helped congeal my opinion that this wasn't, if truth be told, as polemic a transition as first imagined. Rather, nearly three years later, I realize it was the most mind-opening move makeable.

Filmirumination

Filmmaking is, to reduce it to description: extremely complex, highly imaginative, tightly manipulable, and infinitely capable. In light of these typifications, it seems less shocking that someone with a mind attuned to structured disorder would flock to this medium above all else. I find it holistically encompasses a great deal of lesser elements, and presents itself through a visual taxonomy, a language which is universally translatable, and which can therefore impart the most thoughtful of thoughts.

Creatively speaking, film is like a mirror for human thought—for my own thoughts, especially—for it puts into sight what I *see* when I think. At my core, I am a 'visual learner' who seeks and actively engages best with materials when my eyes can intervene. Luckily for me, it seems, Mirzoeff's depiction of the contemporary human experience as being "more visual and visualized than ever before" (p. 4) perfectly suits my physical and ideological makeup! What's more, the eye abounds with metaphors to the camera, and vice versa, but it is in the editing room that my creative instincts most closely parallel the mechanisms of the cinema. In arranging, organizing, and structuring the constituent elements of a sequence of images, I'm able to concede to my self-reflexive tendencies by mimicking my own thought

patterns. Plus, the narrative (or anti-narrative) sequences of ideas that result can be precisely layered with a veritable array meanings, which I find only adds to the infinite allure of filmmaking.

In effect, this process is even further entrenched in my persona in that I value just that—the *process* of editing—more than the *results* that are generated. If I could sum up (my) life, it would currently involve those two terms. Almost like the Butoh performance we watched in class: the outward presentation is glimpsed as a slow, boring, and uninteresting package, but the deeper roots are simultaneously encircling, mind-opening, and literally heart-pounding. Put in a different light, it'll likely only be in looking back on this essay—in ruminating on my rumination—that I'll be able to distill its greatest benefits, for I need time and lived experience through which to distance myself from the concrete result. Otherwise, the value seems overly superficial—too easy. So often, I feel, we get caught up in the tangible, demonstrable rewards of say, coursework, but fail to actively engage with it, or take the time to think it through to a level of understanding greater than a quiz or essay necessitates. Clem Martini's in-class talk on the matter of failure served more to reaffirm my life values than it did to instigate them, for indeed, I feel social awareness of this concept is an outright cliché by now. But still, such behaviours persist in everything from politics to personalities. (Why?).

A quote from one of my all-time greatest creative-insight-generating movies, *Waking Life* (Linklater, 2001), helps to elucidate my point: [talking about an old man who has perplexingly climbed up a telephone post]: "We're no better than him, you know; he's all action and no theory, but we're all theory and no action." Rightly so, it seems, for 'everyone knows' failure is an important stepping stone in the creative process, yet the risk entailed is often enough to overcome brewing 'absurdities'. My paradoxical method for dealing with this is perhaps equally absurd: accumulating relevant knowledge.

A Brainchild from Root to Leaf

I find that even if a project of mine ends in total disaster, the fact that I had good reason, sound intent, and an informed message to communicate, let's me play off the mistakes as insignificant compared to the incidental *experience* gained (in both senses of the word). What's more, this habit of being 'well-read,' or at least abnormally familiar with the materials/concepts I choose to engage with, is a great way to formulate ideas of my own. Here, Kelly and Leggo's notion of 'inventive momentum' is one that I wholeheartedly exemplify (to the extent that I often rely on it to get me out of dead-end situations such as writers blocks, or other such temporary spurts of close-minded thinking). This essentially means that the wealth of content floating around in my short-term memory at any given time can actually create new ideas just by being present in this mental collision space. All postmodern connotations aside, the more you know about something, the more you know how *not* to go about doing something, or about what has already been done to sufficient capacity in your eyes.

This is likely the foremost mental tool I put to use in my imaginative work: the amalgamation of previous attempts (whether they be my own or someone else's) resulting in a wealth of information from which to distill a new, uniquely personal innovation. So primal is it to my artistic technique that, in the paragraphs that follow, I will attempt a part-theoretical, part-physiological investigation into the matter of 'idea generation based on prior knowledge'.

Imagine a *thought* as a single, hypothetical pathway through the core of a giant tree—from the highest leaf's smallest stem to the deepest hair-width root fiber buried underground. Suppose, also, that one particular cluster of root stems is roughly equivalent to an abstract collection of related ideas (say, the bevy of facts pertaining to one particular creative field, like 'film'). Further, see one of the tree's particularly high-sitting branches as the result of an individual's expressing themselves in creative practice (like by creating a short film). This is exactly the model by which I envision creativity (quite literally) stems; broad notions and ideas are sucked up from the world around us, are understood, distilled and transformed by the individual bearing them, then output back into the world in a flurry of creative insight, personal growth, and social enlightenment.

Not coincidentally, this process closely mimics the actually physiological progression of neural connections in the brain:

corresponding groups of synaptic firings intake perceived stimuli, process them as 'ideas', then output information anew. At the end of the day, my believing in this model of creativity further motivates me to dwell and value a *process* more than a *result*.

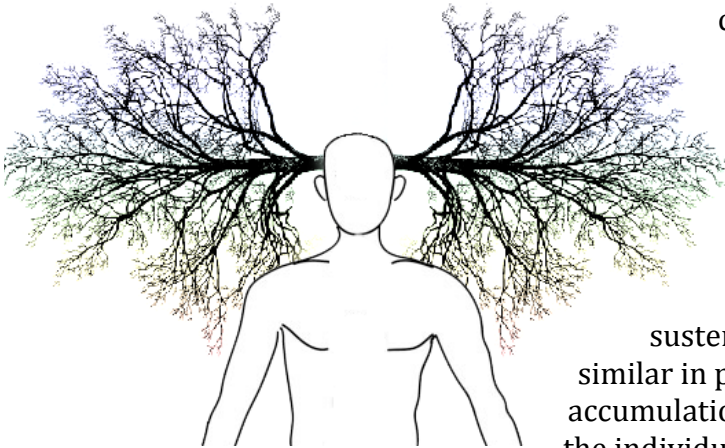
It could be said that the leaves in this model are in a sense reflections of the original sustenance at the roots—different in form but similar in purpose—whereas the transformations and accumulations made at the core—in the tree trunk, or in the individual mind—are unique, relevant, meaningful,

and 'true'.

What's more, the medium of film seems to act as a vicarious mirror image of this process for it captures reality (through mechanical photography) and outputs 'fiction' that serves the same purpose as reality (to divert, to enthrall, whatever it may be), but it is on the film strip itself that all of this potential is actually stored—where the *value* is rooted. The Rodney King video marks this point nicely for such acts of violence can exist in both everyday life and everyday representation, but the video gains its importance (and infamy) from the fact that it exists, above all, as being caught *on tape*.

The Spinning Question Mark

Ultimately, I think my now-blatant science-mindedness is where I derive a lot of my creative energy from: I am always either consciously or subconsciously asking



myself “how does that work?” My deep-rooted passion in uncovering the innermost workings of things totally determines the way I think, which subsequently affects how I act and interact with others, and all of it, I feel, is based off this quest for knowledge, this eternal yearning for learning.

I wonder if I’ll ever outgrow this? I’m sure its rabidity will diminish as I get older (as my brain gets less plastic, thus I come to terms with more of life’s offerings), but I hope I’ll always prefer to know the full depth of a story rather than just glossing its surface for quick effect. Perhaps this will manifest itself in a reappropriation or re-balancing of my ability to think both laterally and vertically, as per Kelly and Leggo’s hypothesis. So many things in life seem to be based around cycles, or rather, *spirals* that eternally converge on some distant (non-existent?) ideal, so, again, the *transition* here seems more important than the dichotomy itself.

Unfortunately, the ceaseless circularity and dynamic evolution of human thought takes on entirely less personal traits when investigated at this level of (im)practicality. As such, I instead offer a succinct summation of the key factors affecting my life and work insofar as creativity is concerned; as follows: personality is abstract and theoretical, as is science at its margins, and both are intensely important to my creative process. Film is the primary means by which I render my own thinking into material existence, and, fittingly enough, the means by which I gain most of my immaterial values. Furthermore, it is only in analyzing or observing the *process* of any given event that its deepest value can be unlocked. When all’s said and done, then, the writing of this essay will undeniably prove to be more beneficial to me than anyone else—why, then, do I even bother with the absurdity of handing it in?

Select Annotatable References

1. Rodney King video
2. Lisa Cartwright’s “Science and the Cinema”
3. Butoh dance video
4. David Bohm’s “On Creativity”
5. Kelly and Leggo’s “Creative Expression, Creative Education”
6. Clem Martini’s in-class speech
7. Christopher Junaway’s “Plato”
8. In-class discussion on visual culture

F2009•FINA203•L01

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Monday, December 14, 2009

Minor revisions: 2009-12-31

An empty sheet of paper.
Your feelings on creativity or mine?